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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, IO/PSC, IO/UNP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/30/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [UNSC](#) [FR](#) [MO](#) [AG](#) [WI](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH EOY ON MINURSO RESOLUTION WILL NOT CALL
SAHARAWI INDEPENDENCE "UNREALISTIC"

REF: STATE 43376 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

¶1. (C) The French MFA's IO desk officer covering the Western Sahara, Jay Darmadhikhari, informed us April 30 that France would present an explanation of vote following the UNSC's extension of MINURSO. That statement, however, would not echo the USG's contention that the option of an independent Sahrawi state as a way of resolving the Western Sahara conflict is not realistic. Darmadhikhari outlined the seven points that would be contained in the French EOY (which he said would follow ours):

--A reference to the Moroccan autonomy plan as a sincere effort to break the existing impasse in UN-led negotiations being held in Manhasset;

--A recognition of the absence of any progress in those talks, which is rendering the overall search for a peaceful resolution "more fragile;"

--A statement that the status quo is unacceptable, given tensions among the parties and the obstacle the dispute poses to meaningful cooperation or integration among the Maghreb countries;

--A salute to the "serious and credible" efforts Morocco has made to find a negotiated solution;

--An assertion that self determination does not ipso facto imply independence coupled with the argument that Morocco's autonomy plan is not a sine qua non for a peaceful resolution but a basis for negotiations and a possible settlement that would respect the principle of self determination;

--A reference to UNSYG Personal Envoy van Walsum's supplemental note to the UNSC and an expression of appreciation to the UNSYG and van Walsum for their work on this issue;

--A call on the UNSC and the parties concerned for "realism" so that the negotiations can enter a new and more productive phase; and

--An emphasis on the importance of "mobilizing" member states and neighbor states to the conflict (i.e., principally Algeria) to support the talks fully and in good faith.

¶2. (C) With respect to the imminent UNSC consideration of the draft UNSCR, Darmadhikhari stated that he understood there was general agreement on the latest draft. Costa Rica, however, on behalf of Polisario/Algeria and others, might submit an amendment seeking to shorten MINURSO's mandate from

the proposed 12 months. In addition, South Africa may ask that the word "endorses" in the second operative paragraph be changed to "notes." (Note: We understand that the current text of this paragraph reads: "Endorses the report's recommendation that realism and a spirit of compromise by the parties are essential to maintain the momentum of the process of negotiations;")

13. (C) We expressed some disappointment and surprise that France had decided in the end not to go further in echoing what van Walsum had forcefully expressed to the UNSC with respect to the unrealistic option of an independent Sahrawi state. This did not seem consistent with what the MFA had indicated was France's rapidly evolving position given the unstable and worrisome security situation in Northwest Africa and its concerns about even the remote possibility of a failed state through which terrorists could circulate with relative impunity. Although we would go ahead with our EO, in spite of sharply negative responses by Algeria and the Polisario to our stated intention, we regretted that the French statement would not state as bluntly or as explicitly what we had agreed to in our private discussions.

14. (C) Darmadhikhari countered by arguing that France was with us on everything but the point on the "realism" of an independent Sahrawi state. He claimed that this EO would further mark the first time France has expressed itself after a vote in this manner on the Western Sahara. The French presidency, whose key members were traveling with President Sarkozy in Tunisia, had ultimately decided not to go any further out of concern for antagonizing the Algerians and Polisario in a way that would complicate French bilateral relations in North Africa or jeopardize the UNSC's support for the Manhasset process. In a brief exchange on the way forward for the UN-led talks, Darmadhikhari agreed that

Algeria, the Polisario, and others have bruited van Walsum's dismissal or Polisario's boycott of the Manhasset discussions until he is replaced. The French understand that Morocco is more eager than ever to continue the talks, even if they make no substantive progress.

15. (C) Comment: For the French, the statement they plan to make is more than half a loaf, and they are not overly troubled that we might be isolated in the UNSC for publicly appearing to rule out Sahrawi independence as a realistic option. We suspect, as NEA A/S David Welch's French counterpart suggested in a phone call with A/S Welch, that internal discussions allowed the "Algeria lobby" within the GOF to temper the earlier expressed MFA readiness to take its publicly positive comments on the Moroccan plan a step further. President Sarkozy needs a reputedly reluctant Algeria's support for his Union for the Mediterranean. French business is eager to pursue business opportunities notwithstanding the ongoing frustration of doing business in the former colony. Darmadhikhari, previously the Algeria desk officer in the Quai, acknowledged that the French ambassador to Algeria's recent speech describing the killing of Algerian nationalists on V-E Day in 1945 as a massacre (i.e., as Algerians prefer to do) may not have been a pure coincidence. We will seek further explanation of France's position after DAS-equivalent for North Africa Nathalie Loiseau returns from Tunisia, but the Department may want to consider formal consultations with the French on next steps on Western Sahara.

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